

COOLING ARRANGEMENT FOR ELECTRONIC SYSTEMS

Technical Field

[0001] This invention relates to the cooling of electronic
5 equipment. The invention has application in the cooling of computer equipment.

Background

[0002] Electronic equipment, and computers in particular, are
10 becoming increasingly powerful. High performance electronic systems tend to generate significant amounts of heat. Modern computer systems need cooling systems to remove the heat generated by computer components such as central processing units (CPUs), graphics processing units (GPUs), high speed interface circuits, and the like. One of the
15 problems faced in the cooling of modern electronic equipment is achieving adequate air flow through the case in which the equipment is housed to move heat out of the system.

[0003] Some personal computers have many fans to cause air to
20 pass over and remove heat from hot components. For example, a modern personal computer may have a fan in the power supply, a powerful fan on a heat sink over the CPU, a fan on the (GPU) of the video card, a fan on an interface integrated circuit, and possibly an extra fan to push additional air into the case. The need to cool the components of high
25 performance computer systems has led to the development of water and Freon based cooling systems despite the cost and complexity of such systems.

[0004] There are many significant sources of heat in a modern personal computer. In addition to the CPU and the power supply, these sources of heat can include peripheral cards (e.g. ISA, AGP, PCI, PCI-X, PCIExpress™, InfiniBand™, etc.). Video cards, in particular generate significant amounts of heat.

[0005] Computer systems and certain other electronic equipment typically include a number of cards which plug into a main system board or backplane. Figure 1 shows, for example, a typical peripheral card **10**. Card **10** comprises a printed circuit board (PCB) **12** with a plate **14** attached at one of its ends. Plate **14** is typically a metal plate. Plate **14** extends at right angles to PCB **12**. Plate **14** typically includes one or more connectors, and/or indicators **16** in order for users to make use of the function provided by the card (e.g. video, network, modem).

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[0006] One or more connectors **18** are provided to plug card **10** into corresponding mating connectors of a main system board or backplane. As shown in Figure 2, a main board **20** typically has a row of peripheral card connectors **22** laid out parallel to a flat side **26** of a case. Connectors **22** are positioned and oriented such that when a peripheral card **10** is plugged in, its plate **14** will line up with and be flush against an opening **30** in side **26**. This construction exposes connectors and indicators **16** on plates **14** to the outside of the case for use. Openings **30** are lined up beside each other and are typically closely spaced to maximize the number of peripheral cards that can be accommodated by the case.

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[0007] In some electronic equipment, the case geometry does not provide room to plug peripheral cards directly into the main system board. This is common in rack mounted equipment. In such systems, peripheral cards are mounted horizontally and plug into a separate PCB
5 which in turn plugs into the main system board.

[0008] Where electronic equipment is mounted in vertical racks (e.g. 19" and 23" equipment racks), it is generally not possible to provide effective air vents on the top, bottom or sides of the equipment. It has to
10 be assumed that there will be other equipment mounted above and below the electronic equipment in question. It has to be assumed that there will be other racks alongside the rack containing the electronic equipment in question. In most cases, the only option is to pass air through the front and back of the electronic equipment.

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[0009] Providing adequate venting on the front and back faces of a rack-mounted electronic system is difficult. The front of the system may have some combination of a display device (e.g. LCD), a small keypad, pluggable disk drive cartridges, floppy drives, etc. For example, the rack
20 mounted computer 34 shown in Figure 3A only has air vents in the front bezels of removable disk drives 36 and 37.

[0010] Figure 3B shows the back of computer 34. The back of rack mounted electronic systems usually have cable connectors for power,
25 network communication, display monitors, serial communication lines, etc. The back of the system may also be encumbered by the area 40 reserved for plug-in peripheral cards. As a result of all these components

it can be difficult to allocate adequate area for cooling air vents. For example, the back of computer 34 only has air vents in two power supply modules 38 and 39.

5 [0011] If a peripheral card slot is not being used, the opening in the case corresponding to that slot could be left open to allow for cooling air flow. This would allow electromagnetic interference (EMI) to escape from the equipment however. It is standard practice to close up the unused openings using blank metal plates.

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[0012] One vendor currently offers a fan in a PCI card form factor that plugs into an empty slot in a personal computer. The fan draws air into the system through an opening in the metal plate and blows it on to other peripheral cards and through the rest of the system. This reduces
15 the number of peripheral cards that can be accommodated.

[0013] There is a need for improved air cooling systems for electronic equipment and, particularly, for peripheral cards of electronic equipment.

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Summary of the Invention

[0014] This invention provides electronic equipment which includes venting openings in the vicinity of add in cards. One aspect of the invention provides electronic apparatus comprising at least first and
25 second connectors spaced apart from one another to accommodate first and second adjacent parallel cards. The first and second connectors are located at different distances in a first direction along the first and second

cards from an imaginary line extending perpendicular to the parallel cards. The apparatus includes a case. The case encloses the first and second connectors. The case has a wall which has first and second aperture-bearing portions respectively carrying first and second
5 apertures. The apertures are respectively located to expose end portions of the first and second cards. The first and second aperture-bearing portions are at different levels in the first direction. The case includes a transitional portion between the first and second aperture-bearing portions, the transitional portion includes at least one vent aperture.

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[0015] Another aspect of the invention provides electronic apparatus comprising a plurality of mutually-adjacent slots for receiving added cards. Each of the slots comprises a connector spaced-apart from an aperture-bearing portion of a case by a standard distance. The
15 aperture-bearing portions of the case are each apertured to expose an end portion of a card, if present, in the corresponding slot. The aperture-bearing portions of the case are at a plurality of different levels relative to an imaginary line extending perpendicular to the slots. The case includes one or more transitional portions extending between adjacent
20 aperture-bearing portions of different levels. The transitional portions including vent openings.

[0016] Further aspects of the invention and features of specific embodiments of the invention are described below.

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Brief Description of the Drawings

[0017] In drawings which illustrate non-limiting embodiments of the invention:

Figure 1 is a perspective view of a prior art peripheral card;

5 Figure 2 is a top plan view of a number of peripheral cards illustrating the placement of peripheral cards relative to the system case of a prior art system;

Figure 3A is a front view of a rack mount computer of a general type known in the prior art;

10 Figure 3B is a rear view of the rack mount computer of Figure 3A;

Figure 4 is a sectional view through a system case according to the invention having peripheral card openings staggered in a direction normal to a surface of the system case;

15 Figure 5 is a partial isometric view showing the placement of air vents between peripheral card openings in a system case according to the invention and Figure 5A is an elevation view thereof;

Figure 6 is a schematic sectional view through a system case and peripheral cards of an electronic system according to the invention illustrating air flow through air vents adjacent to each peripheral card
20 opening;

Figure 7 is a schematic sectional view through a system case and peripheral cards of an electronic system according to an alternative embodiment of the invention having a single peripheral card opening on a protrusion from the main case surface with air vents on the sides of the
25 protrusion;

Figure 8 is an isometric view illustrating possible locations of air vents in the protrusion of Figure 7; and,

Figure 9 is a section through a system case and peripheral cards of an electronic system wherein slots for receiving peripheral cards are angled relative to a case of the system.

5 Description

[0018] Throughout the following description, specific details are set forth in order to provide a more thorough understanding of the invention. However, the invention may be practiced without these particulars. In other instances, well known elements have not been
10 shown or described in detail to avoid unnecessarily obscuring the invention. Accordingly, the specification and drawings are to be regarded in an illustrative, rather than a restrictive, sense.

[0019] This invention provides electronic systems designed to
15 accommodate peripheral cards in such a manner that the rear plates of adjacent peripheral cards are staggered relative to one another. Cases of systems according to the invention have additional surfaces in which venting apertures may be provided.

20 [0020] Figure 4 shows electronic equipment **50** according to one embodiment of the invention. Equipment **50** has a case **52** which houses a board **54** bearing connectors **22** for receiving peripheral cards **10**. Case **52** may be made of an electrical conductor, such as a suitable metal, to provide shielding against electromagnetic radiation. Case **52** has
25 openings **56** for receiving plates **14** of peripheral cards **10**. Plates **14** are also typically of metal. The distance between connectors **22** and plates **14**

is typically standardized so that peripheral cards (or, more generally, add in cards) from various manufacturers can be used in equipment 50.

[0021] The locations capable of receiving add-in cards may be
5 called slots. When an add-in card is present in a slot, a connector on the add-in card engages the connector 22 of the slot and an end plate of the add-in card extends to an aperture-bearing portion of case 52 which is penetrated by the aperture 56 for that slot. The embodiment of Figure 4 has four mutually-adjacent slots.

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[0022] In equipment 50, connectors 22 are oriented so that peripheral cards 10 extend generally parallel to one another. Connectors 22 are not all located at the same distance from a line, such as line 59, which extends substantially perpendicular to peripheral cards 10. This
15 causes plates 14 of at least some adjacent peripheral cards 10 to be located at different distances from line 59 (i.e. at different levels relative to an imaginary line extending transversely to the slots). Line 59 is typically parallel to a rear edge 55 of board 54 although this is not mandatory (see, for example, Figure 9).

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[0023] The portion of case 52 in which apertures 56 are formed is not flat but follows a crooked path so that aperture-bearing portions 60 which carry apertures 56 are at the expected locations of plates 14. This portion of case 52 includes transitional sections 62 which connect
25 aperture-bearing portions 60 which are at different levels to one another and transitional sections 62A which connect aperture-bearing portions 60 to surrounding portions 64 of case 52 which are not at the same level as

the corresponding aperture-bearing portions **60**. Individual ones of aperture-bearing portions **60** may be deeper than, at the same level as, or shallower than portions **64** of case **52** which surround the area accommodating peripheral cards **10**.

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[0024] In equipment **50**, case **52** is slightly deeper than it would be otherwise. The extra depth allows the surface of the case in the area of peripheral cards **10** to be staggered as shown. It is usually possible to extend the depth of the case by a small amount, such as 1-2 inches or even a few inches without any problems.

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[0025] It can be seen that the surface area of the rear face of case **52** in the vicinity of cards **10** is increased significantly relative to that of case **26** (Figure 2). Transitional sections **62** and **62A** provide surfaces which are available to accommodate vents.

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[0026] As shown in Figure 5, in electronic equipment **50A** according to one embodiment of the invention, openings **70** are provided in transitional sections **62** in the vicinity of peripheral card apertures **56**.

20 Openings **70** may function as vents to allow cooling air to be drawn into case **52A** in the immediate vicinity of peripheral cards. If EMI is a concern, openings **70** can be covered with EMI protection (e.g. a metal mesh) or provided in the pattern of a mesh as shown in Figure 5. While Figure 5 shows regular arrays of openings **70**, openings **70** may be arranged in any suitable pattern. Openings **70** may have any suitable sizes and shapes. In some embodiments, openings **70** have the form of elongated slots.

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[0027] Figure 5A shows an elevational view of system **50A**. It can be seen that the spacing **D** between plates **14** in a direction perpendicular to cards **10** can be small. The area of transitional portions **62** which can bear vent openings **70** can be significantly larger than the projected area **D**×**L** between plates **14** as seen in Figure 5A. In some embodiments of the invention, the area of one or more transitional portions **62** exceeds the projected area **D**×**L** by a factor in excess of 3, 5, 10 or 15. In some embodiments, the distance measured along a transitional portion **62** exceeds **D** by a factor in excess of 3, 5, 10 or 15.

[0028] In the embodiment of Figure 5A, apertures **56** are elongated. More specifically, apertures **56** are rectangular. End plates **14** are slightly larger than apertures **56** and overlap apertures **56**.

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[0029] In apparatus capable of accommodating several peripheral cards, the levels of peripheral card apertures **56** can vary according to any of various patterns, either regular or random. A suitable pattern may be chosen to satisfy air flow requirements of the electronic equipment. In Figure 4, each peripheral card aperture **56** is stepped inward by the same distance relative to its neighbour above (as viewed in Figure 4). The amount by which each card is stepped inwardly could, for example, be about ½ inch or, for a broader example, an amount in the range of about 1/8 inch to about 1½ inches.

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[0030] Figure 6 shows equipment **50B** according to an alternative embodiment of the invention wherein a first set **75A** of aperture-bearing

portions **60** step successively inwardly as one moves downwardly (relative to the orientation of Figure 6) and a second set **75B** step outwardly as one moves downwardly. In the example shown in Figure 6, aperture-bearing portions **60** form a bilaterally symmetrical pattern. In an
5 alternative embodiment of the invention (not shown) the first set of aperture-bearing portions step outwardly and the second set of aperture-bearing portions step inwardly.

[0031] Figures 7 and 8 illustrate apparatus **50C** and **50D** according
10 to further embodiments of the invention in which the plates **14** of most peripheral cards **10** are at the same level **L1** and one of the peripheral cards **10A** projects to a different level **L2** which is greater than **L1**. The designs illustrated in Figures 7 and 8 may be used to provide enhanced venting for a single peripheral card **10A** which generates more heat than
15 other peripheral cards **10**. In an alternative embodiment of the invention (not shown), **L2** is less than **L1**.

[0032] Air vents **70** may be located adjacent to any side of a peripheral card aperture **56**. They are not restricted to being located
20 adjacent to a long edge of the peripheral card aperture. Figure 8 shows apparatus wherein some air vents **70A** are located on a transitional surface **78** adjacent a short side of a peripheral card aperture **56**.

[0033] In the embodiments of Figures 7 and 8, an aperture-bearing
25 portion **60A** forms an outer end of a projection **80**. The sides of projection **80** are formed by transitional portions **62A**, **62B**, **68** and a transitional portion (not shown) opposed to transitional portion **68**.

[0034] Figure 9 depicts a system **50E** wherein cards **10** are oriented at an acute angle to a face of case **52**. In this embodiment, cards **10** each project to a different level relative to an imaginary line **59** which extends at right angles to cards **10**. Case **52** is formed to provide a series of steps. One face of each step bears an aperture **56** which corresponds with a plate **14** of a corresponding card **10**. The other face of each step constitutes a transitional portion of case **52** which includes vent apertures **70**.

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[0035] In any of the embodiments of the invention described above, any suitable arrangement of fans or other air moving mechanisms may be arranged to cause air to flow in and/or out through apertures **70**. Some embodiments of the invention include fans mounted on peripheral cards **10**.

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[0036] It can be seen that the arrangements described herein permits vents to be provided in a case between adjacent peripheral cards **10** without requiring peripheral cards **10** to be spaced apart excessively.

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[0037] Where a component (e.g. a card, module, assembly, processor, device, circuit, etc.) is referred to above, unless otherwise indicated, reference to that component (including a reference to a "means") should be interpreted as including as equivalents of that component any component which performs the function of the described component (i.e., that is functionally equivalent), including components which are not structurally equivalent to the disclosed structure which

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performs the function in the illustrated exemplary embodiments of the invention.

[0038] As will be apparent to those skilled in the art in the light of
5 the foregoing disclosure, many alterations and modifications are possible
in the practice of this invention without departing from the spirit or scope
thereof. Accordingly, the scope of the invention is to be construed in
accordance with the substance defined by the following claims.